

Open Door Bible Church -- May 13, 2001 (Mother's Day)
Paul G. Apple

TEXT: ACTS 12:7-11, 15, 23 (TOPICAL)

TITLE: ANGELS ARE FOR REAL

BIG IDEA:
WHAT DO ANGELS DO?

INTRODUCTION:

Billy Graham wrote a little book back in 1975 -- *Angels: God's Secret Agents*. I like that title -- angels work behind the scenes in that invisible spiritual realm where we tend to forget about them; but angels have a very prominent role in carrying out specific missions from God. Today we want to look at this passage (and some other verses scattered through the Scriptures) to get some basic idea of **What Do Angels Do?** We know that they are **For Real** ... but do we really understand their role in God's program?

Now I know that it is Mother's Day. Like Brian mentioned last week I have always been impressed growing up that whenever we hit a special day of celebration, the sermon for the day always had some special application. It is a bit of a challenge here ... Obviously all the moms were little angels as children ... and they are devoting their valuable time raising little angels ... but that's not the kind of angels we want to talk about today. So I came up with a different type of application:

Kids, it is Important for you to listen to this message. Are you with me? You are going to learn a lot about how to make your Mom happy. How many of you made Mom a special card for today? I'm going to use the example of angels to show you a nice present you can give your Mom -- not just on Mother's Day but every day!

My favorite angel is Clarence -- *It's a Wonderful Life* ... because Steve and Julie have had a chance to be in that production at Tobey's Dinner Theater. Not a biblical figure ... When Jimmy Stewart is ready to throw in the towel and commit suicide, Clarence helps restore his hope and his sense of significance ... Clarence acts in his own bumbling, stumbling way -- certainly not a biblical representation -- probably quite offensive to God's real angels ... yet the media is where we have picked up most of our information about angels, isn't it ... a lot of it is erroneous ... What do we learn from:

Touched by An Angel

We need some good solid biblical insight into the role and function of angels -- (How many messages have you heard about angels?)

WHAT DO THEY REALLY DO?

(concentrating on the first two points of the outline)

(Note: some Bible references taken from sermon on Angels by Duke Jeffries)

I. ANGELS APPRECIATE AUTHORITY

A. They Understand the Difference between Submission and Rebellion

Background:

Creation of Angels -- above man on the scale of creation

Heb. 2:7 regarding the Incarnation "*Thou hast made Him for a little while lower than the angels*";

But believers destined to end up in a more exalted state by virtue of our union with Christ.

Angels were present to observe the creation of the earth. (Job 38:4-7; Ex. 20:11) -- "*morning stars*" / "*sons of God*"

Fall of Angels -- apparently sometime after the 6th day of creation when God looked around and proclaimed everything "Good";

No second chance for the angels who fell; no plan of redemption for them; led by Lucifer in his pride and rebellion and self-will; (Is. 14:12-15; 2 Pete. 2:4; Jude 5-6)

The good angels have apparently been confirmed in holiness -- we will only be talking about good angels

Remember the same angels who are around now were around back then ... elephants have good memories but angels have long memories ... they know how important it is to submit to God's structure of authority

Some Characteristics of Angels:

- Very numerous (Deut. 33:2; Psalm 68:17; Matt. 26:47-56; Rev. 5:11-12)
- Very powerful -- but limitations -- cannot create; dependent and derived power; their intervention is governed by God (Psalm 103:20; 2 Pet. 2:11); cf. angel removing stone from tomb of Christ
- Very wise (2 Sam. 14:17-20)
 - created wise (but not omniscient -- don't know the time of the Lord's return)
 - 6,000 years to observe and increase their learning
- Very Fast -- localized, but can get around quickly -- Dan. 9:21
- Sexless (Matt. 22:23-30)
- Holy -- Talking about their nature ... confirmed in holiness ... rather talking more today about what they do
- Can take on Human appearance
 - Billy Graham:** "Intrinsically, they do not possess physical bodies, although they may take on physical bodies when God appoints them to special tasks."

B. They Appear to Be Organized on the Basis of Some Type of Hierarchy

Archangel = Highest Rank -- How many? much debate
at least Michael -- Jude 8 (Dan. 12:1-2; 1 Thess. 4:13-17)

Col 1:16 all things created by Christ ... *"both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities"*

(Eph. 3:10, 6:12; 1 Pet 3:22)

Territorial Angels?? Dan. 10

Prince of Persia; Prince of Grecia, etc. are angels entrusted with the special oversight of particular kingdoms?

Organized by Function?? seraphim (Is. 6:1-8) and cherubim (Gen. 3:22-24; Ps. 18:6-12; Ezek 1:4-14; 10:1-22)...

Get into our passage -- Acts 12

C. They Respond to Commands Issued by Superiors / They Faithfully Perform a Specific Mission

Peter understood this: *"Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel"* (vs 11)

Kids, what type of obedience do you think angels demonstrate??

Never question God -- "God, I don't think this mission is such a good idea .. it sounds pretty dangerous; there are a lot of demons out there who are going to try to delay me"

Never back talk -- "Why are you sending me to take out the trash ... what about Gabriel?"

Never drag their wings -- "Not now, God, I'll do it later though ... you can count one me; What would have happened to Peter if this angel had been just one day late?"

Never just complete just half of the assignment -- "Well, I didn't rescue Peter, but I did deliver your other message"

They obey immediately and completely and without question; they take commands very seriously; they know their role

Application to kids: Once you have settled the key issue of who is the central authority in your life and submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ ... then submission to the other realms of God-ordained authority should fall into place. The most important for children is their respect of the authority of their parents. Important safeguard in your life.

D. They Issue Commands and Expect Obedience / They Faithfully Perform a Specific Mission

First, the angel got Peter's attention -- poked him in the ribs ("roused him") -- sort of how wives treat husbands who snore ...

"Get up quickly" -- might have been a problem for some of us (Stephen's not here .. dangerous ... I think even an angel would have a tough time getting him up)

"Gird yourself and put on your sandals"

"Wrap your cloak around you and follow me"

Somewhat of a rerun (Acts 5:19)

E. They Are Observing This Morning to See How Moms and Dads Fulfill Their God-Appointed Roles in the Church

1 Cor. 11:10 *"Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels"* -- Passage dealing with authority and submission and God-appointed roles

Angels are amazed when they see anyone rebelling against God's ordained authority.

1 Cor. 4:9 -- like we are performing on stage in big amphitheater and angels watching (1 Tim. 5:21 -- regarding elders and discipline issues)

II. ANGELS MINISTER TO THE DESPERATE NEEDS OF SAINTS

You don't see angels sent on unimportant, insignificant missions. They seem to be held in reserve for those special times of crisis.

No question that Peter was in a serious bind.

Herod was persecuting the Christians to appease the Jews in the hope that it would solidify the Jews' support. This Herod was Herod Agrippa I. He was the third in a line of four Herods, the first of whom had killed the babies in Jerusalem when he heard of Jesus' birth. This Herod had already murdered the Apostle James and was looking to add another notch to his belt.

Herod had taken every precaution to prevent Peter from being freed by Christian sympathizers. He had assigned four groups of four soldiers each to take turns guarding Peter -- so Peter was handcuffed to a guard on either side of him; and two other guards stood watch at the door of the prison.

A. Their Very Nature is to Serve as Ministering Spirits

Heb. 1:14 *"Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?"*

cf. angels ministering to Christ after His encounter with Satan in the wilderness

cf. angels ministering to Elijah when he was at the end of his rope and fearing for his life after his great victory over the priests and prophets of Baal -- helped him to recover
1 Kings 19

(angels seem especially good at food preparation -- Mother's Day application?!)

If someone performs an important service for you, appropriate to thank them ...

When was the last time you thanked the Lord for the ministry of His angels?

B. They Respond to Prayers of Desperate Saints (at the direction of the Lord; we don't pray to angels)

Memory Verse from last week: James 5:16b *"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective"*

Acts 12:5 *"prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God"*
How many days had they been praying?? maybe almost a week

C. They Rescue Saints from Dangerous Situations = Key emphasis

Memory Verse: Psalm 91:11 *"For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways."*

Concept of a **Guardian Angel** -- (just had dedication of some of our little ones last week)

Matt 18:10 *"See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you, that their angels in heaven continually behold the face of My Father who is in heaven."*
(proves that angels look out for the welfare of children; but doesn't prove that each believer has his own guardian angel)

D. They Fight Significant Battles

1. Spiritual Battles going on behind the scenes
2. Physical Battles in the lives of saints

2 Chron 32:21 -- Lord sent an angel to deliver Hezekiah and Judah from the Assyrians
(2 Kings 19:35)

E. They Deliver Important Messages

Here the message is one of Deliverance and Safety from Enemies

Greek word means "messenger"

announcing the birth of Christ

(Just touch briefly on these last 2 points)

III. ANGELS ARE VERY REAL AND VERY ACTIVE -- EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE TOUGH TO IDENTIFY

A. Angels are Very Real

B. Angels are Very Active -- Incredibly Busy

C. Angels are Tough to Identify

Heb. 13:2 -- *"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it"*

(Do angels really have wings?? cf. Clarence trying to earn his wings picture speed and mobility - p.32)

Summary: God uses angels more extensively than we normally think.

Interesting confusion in vs. 15 -- they mistook Peter for his guardian angel

Story of Elisha -- king of Aram warring against Israel; attendant of the man of God was pretty worried -- **2 Kings 6:14-20**

Our reaction: What shall we do? God is in control

IV. ANGELS SPECIALIZE IN WORSHIP AND JUDGMENT

A. Angels Specialize in Worship -- seraphim; cherubim

Not all tied up in knots about what is their next significant mission.

Find fulfillment in doing what they were created to do = worshipping their Creator.

Heb. 1:6 speaking of Christ, quoting Psalm 97:7 *"And let all the angels of God worship Him"*

Rev 7:11

B. Angels Specialize in Judgment -- Herod did not fare too well

When Christ comes in His Kingdom, the saints, who are to reign with him, will be judges over the angels (1 Cor. 6:2,3)

Rev 15-16

CONCLUSION:

A few closing reminders:

- Don't worship angels -- they help to showcase the glory and splendor of the majesty of God -- message of Heb 1 -- Christ is far superior to angels
- Don't place our faith in angels or pray to them or look to them as the source of our help and deliverance -- We look to God who may choose to use angels to help us
- Take comfort and joy in God's provision of them to us as ministers to our needs -- especially protecting us and delivering us from desperate situations
- Be aware that they are real and they are active and they are engaged in unseen spiritual warfare

But what really struck me in this study is the opportunity that we have to be God's visible Agents in carrying out His purposes for history. Angels are God's Secret Agents working behind the scenes ... but we have a lot of similar opportunities:

- 1) We need to **Appreciate Authority** -- Kids, did you get that message?? Angels are watching so show them that you obey your Mom
- 2) We can **minister to the needs of saints** around us -- maybe not in as dramatic or powerful a fashion as angels ... but in a more consistent day-by-day ongoing basis ...

It takes initiative to see a need and then reach out in love to meet that need.

Talking about **delivering important messages** from God -- There is no message more important than the truth of the gospel that we are charged with communicating to a lost and dying world. God doesn't use angels for that .. He wants to use us!

3) We are **very real** and should be **very active** in being involved in God's program for this world. Hopefully you aren't trying to live as a hidden Christian ... It shouldn't be difficult for the world to identify our commitment to Christ.

4) Finally, we should take every opportunity to **specialize in Worship**. -- The Father seeks those who would worship Him in spirit and in truth. The **Judgment** part we will leave to the end times when Christ returns with all of his holy angels and we end up participating in the judgment of angels.

Note Re Death of Christ: He could have called 10,000 angels to destroy the world and set Him free ... but He chose to die there for you and me.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What are some specific current day angel sightings that you know about? Check out the website <http://applecity.com/Angels/> for some interesting stories about angels. Do you think that any UFO incidents can be attributed to angelic activity?

2) Why are angels so interested in observing God's plan of redemption for sinful men and women (1 Pet. 1:12)? Note how they rejoice at the conversion of sinners (Luke 15:10).

3) Trace how the ministry of angels seems to be intensified during those periods of time where God is beginning a new program or new age. Why would this be true?

4) Why do we tend to overlook the extent of the ministry of angels today? When was the last time we thanked God for the ministry of angels?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Buswell: "In general it may be said that God governs not only by cosmic impersonal forces, not merely by automation, but that God's government over the universe includes a vast amount of personal relationships, very beautiful and stimulating to our imagination."

John Calvin: " The angels are the dispensers and administrators of the Divine beneficence toward us; they regard our safety, undertake our defense, direct our ways

and exercise a constant solicitude that no evil befall us."

Billy Graham: "Angels belong to a uniquely different dimension of creation which we, limited to the natural order, can scarcely comprehend. In this angelic domain the limitations are different from those God has imposed on our natural order. He has given angels higher knowledge, power and mobility than us. Have you ever seen or met one of these superior beings called angels? They are God's messengers whose chief business is to carry out His orders in the world. He has given them an ambassadorial charge. He has designated and empowered them as holy deputies to perform works of righteousness. In this way they assist Him as their creator while He sovereignly controls the universe. So He has given them the capacity to bring His holy enterprises to a successful conclusion." (p. 18)